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AUTHOR	Bushell, Don, Jr.
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ABSTRACT

A system for continuously evaluating the ongoing progress of each child in Project Follow Through classrooms that are involved in the Behavior Analysis Program is discussed briefly. The steps in the process are: (1) define an instructional objective; (2) record the weekly book and page placement of every child in the class on a special roster; (3) enter placements on a special progress chart; (4) translate the teacher's weekly placement information into pencil marks that are read by an optical scanning machine; (5) check the placements by computer to ascertain whether a child has exceeded or fallen short of his progress target for that week; (6) combine information concerning the child's recent progress history and his objective for the year, and set specific target for the coming week; and (7) telephone the new set of targets to a teletype in the local district so that, at the beginning of the next day, the teacher receives a new set of individualized targets for each child in the class. (DB)

EVALUATING CLASSROOM PROGRESS

Don Bushell, Jr.

University of Kansas

The evaluation of early childhood education programs has tended to focus on the use of standardized tests that assess final outcomes. It is an interesting process, but it has very little to do with the requirements of an ongoing instructional program.

Regardless of its specific objective, any educational program seeks change. Consequently, the relevant evaluation system is the one that provides frequent information about the progress or the lack of progress being made toward the final objective--a system that measures change! Once we accept the primary importance of formative, criterion-referenced, evaluation we will be able to avoid unproductive debate about the appropriateness of various summative evaluations and concentrate on building continuous progress measures that shape and guide the developmental process called education.

In our work with Project Follow Through during the past five years, my colleagues at the University of Kansas and I have devoted a major share of our energy and resources to developing a system for continuously evaluating the ongoing progress of every child in each classroom that is implementing our Behavior Analysis program. Obviously, our continuous progress measures are keyed to the specific instructional objectives of our program, but I suspect that the general procedure we are following is just as appropriate to any educational strategy--perhaps to any process of planned change.

The first step in the sequence, as you may have heard, is to define an instructional objective. Once this target is established it can be compared with the entering or current skill level of the student, and the distance between the two can be broken into a series of small steps that are to be accomplished during the forty weeks of instruction available during the school year. In practice, it often turns out that the steps to be mastered closely correspond to a certain number of pages in the curriculum. Under these circumstances, continuous progress evaluation is the process of ascertaining that each child has mastered 1/40th of the distance to his annual target each week.

For a number of years each Behavior Analysis teacher has recorded the weekly book and page placement of every child in the class on a special roster. These placements are then entered on a class progress chart indicating the number of children working at each step level each week. In successive weeks the progress of the children is graphically portrayed by the upward movement of the placement distributions. Snags and hitches in progress can be detected and extra training and support can be provided on a selective basis. It is a very simple process, quite analogous to the work of a ship's navigator who measures daily location and reports any need for course adjustment. Unfortunately, in education we seem to be in the habit of asking for navigational measures to document how far off port we were at the end of the voyage.

Our most recent efforts in the development of an effective system for continuous progress measurement and feedback take advantage of the technology of data communication. Now the teacher's weekly placement information is translated into pencil marks that are read by an optical

scanning machine. The scanner telephones the placements to our computer center at the University where we check to see whether a child has exceeded or fallen short of his progress target for that week. Then, by combining information about the child's recent progress history and his objective for the year, a specific target is set for the coming week. The new set of targets is telephoned back to a teletype in the local district so, at the beginning of the next day, the teacher receives a new set of individualized targets for each child in the class. As the process is repeated every week, a moving record of achievement is described that is far more useful to the teacher, to us, and to the children than any standardized test.

We are just beginning to learn how to accomplish continuous progress evaluation that can support and assist the classroom teacher. It already seems clear, however, that it can be very rewarding to take a developmental approach to evaluating the developmental process called education.